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## A Guide for Students

Preparing to Write  
the English 33  
Diploma Examination

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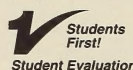


# Preparing to Write the English 33 Diploma Exam

Dear Student:

The authors of this guide are staff from the Student Evaluation Branch. These are the people who actually put together the exam you will be writing. They also organize the marking sessions and train the teachers who mark the exams. These people see first-hand what thousands of students are doing right (and wrong) when they write an exam.

This guide and all other diploma exam-related materials produced by Student Evaluation Branch staff are identified with the logos



I hope you will find this guide helpful. Good luck on exam day!

Frank Horvath, Director  
Student Evaluation Branch

## Getting ready

### ✓Be there

The best way to prepare to write the English 33 diploma exam is to decide, early in the semester, that you will attend class regularly, participate in classroom activities, hand in all assignments, improve your reading and writing skills, and learn what the course has to offer.

Your class work is worth 50% of your final mark in English 33 and the skills that you practise when you participate in class and complete your assignments are the same skills that you need for success in writing your English 33 diploma exam.

### ✓Understand the parts of the exam

The English 33 diploma exam has two parts, each worth 50%. You will write these two parts on different days.

- PART A: WRITTEN RESPONSE has three different writing assignments. These are
  - Section I: Personal Response to Literature
  - Section II: Functional Writing
  - Section III: Response to Visual Communication
- PART B: READING has a booklet of readings of fiction, non-fiction, drama, and poetry, and a booklet of 70 multiple-choice questions about these readings.

Prepare yourself for success on both parts of the exam by developing and practising your reading, writing, and thinking skills during the term.

**✓Review previous exams**

One effective way to prepare for the English 33 diploma exam is to review and do the most recent exams.

Copies of these exams should be on file in your school. Or, you can purchase copies for \$2.00 each from Alberta Education's LEARNING RESOURCES DISTRIBUTING CENTRE at 12360 142 Street Edmonton Alberta T5L 4X9  
Phone: 403-427-2767, FAX: 403-422-9750

## ***General advice for writing Part A: Written Response***

**✓Understand the design of the exam**

There are three separate writing assignments. You can start with the one that you feel the most confident about. Or, if it suits you better, start with the one that you are least sure of, or the one that will take you the most time. You should work through the exam in the way that best fits with your own writing and thinking style.

Remember that the three assignments are marked for slightly different things, and that the first assignment is worth 25 marks, the second 15 marks, and the third 10 marks, for a total of 50 marks.

**✓Learn what is expected of you**

On pages 6, 7, and 8 we give you some specific suggestions for each writing assignment. You will be even better prepared if you learn what markers look for in each assignment. The scoring criteria that markers use are in the *English 33 Information Bulletin*. (See page 11.) Your teacher has this bulletin and the scoring criteria.

During the school year, learn what these criteria mean, and try to evaluate your own work by using the criteria.

**✓Believe that you have something important to say**

Take ownership of the ideas that you want to communicate to your reader. Do not think of the writing assignments as work done for someone else. Find a way to make them important to *you*. Remember that what you say is important and is worth communicating.

**✓Use your time wisely**

Some students seem to enter the examination room with the goal of finishing as quickly as they can. But is this really a worthwhile goal?



We strongly recommend that you use *all* the time available to

- **read** the assignments carefully
- **think** about what you are being asked to do
- **plan** your writing so that it will focus on the topic and will make sense to your reader
- **reread** your writing and ask yourself if you have communicated in the best way that you can
- **improve** your finished work by adding or changing words or sentences
- **check** your finished work for spelling, grammar, and punctuation
- **correct** your mistakes directly on your finished work

The examination is designed so that most students can finish comfortably in two and one-half hours. However, there is an additional half hour for you to use in rereading and correcting your work. Why not use all three hours to get the best mark you possibly can?

✓ **Read all the assignments and instructions carefully**

The time you spend in reading and thinking about the assignments is time well spent. The assignments are carefully worded, and they mean exactly what they say. So, be sure that you have read and thought about what the assignments ask you to do.

✓ **Make notes in the exam booklet**

The exam booklet is yours to use. Write on it and mark it up as much as you need to. Take a highlighter into the examination room. Highlight or underline key words in the assignments. This should help you to focus on what is expected.

✓ **Plan your writing**

For each assignment, there is space in the exam booklet for planning. Use that space to help you stay focused and to organize your writing.

There are many ways to plan. During the school year, try different ways of planning until you find the best method for you—outline, thought web, key words, list of main ideas, conclusion written first, clusters of examples, or whatever.

You will need to know the kind of planning that helps you to keep your writing organized, interesting, full of important and relevant details, and on task. How you plan is up to you, but remember that planned writing is almost always successful writing—so plan to plan.

✓ **Use your own language**

Write your responses in your own language so that the teachers who mark your exam can hear *you*. Avoid copying phrases and sentences directly from the preambles or the assignments in the exam booklet.

Don't try to use "fancy" language just because teachers are going to read your writing. Use words and sentence structures that are clear, correct, and precise, and that are familiar to you. Teacher-markers want to read *your* ideas expressed in your own words.

**✓Use your reference materials with care**

You may use a dictionary (English language and/or translation), a thesaurus, and a handbook when you write Part A: Written Response. However, unless you have learned how to use these references throughout the year when you are writing, they will be of little help to you during the exam.

Use your dictionary to look up the meanings of words that you want to use but are not completely sure about. Check spellings. Many writers keep a mental list of the particular words that they frequently misspell and always check those words. It pays to know about your own strengths and weaknesses.

A thesaurus can be useful if you need to find a more precise word for what you are saying. But use it carefully. Again, unless you have practised using a thesaurus during the year, it will not help you at exam time.

Use your handbook to check on punctuation rules, word usage, verb tenses, grammatical agreement (for example, subject-verb or pronoun-antecedent), and sentence construction. Like the dictionary and thesaurus, a handbook will help you only if you have learned how to use it during the school year.

**✓Ask about writing your exam on a word processor**

If you normally do your written work on a word processor, you may have an opportunity to use a word processor for writing your diploma exam. Speak to your English 33 teacher about this. Every school now has copies of the Interim Policy: *Writing Diploma Examinations with Word Processors*.

A word processor may be helpful if you are accustomed to using it. Otherwise, it may cause you to lose marks.

**✓Use Spell Check with care**

If you are using a word processor, use its spell check feature carefully. Spell check is not magic! Spell check will identify words that the computer does not recognize, and it will provide you with some possible alternatives. It will not "correct" your spelling. You have to look at the word that you used, consider the list provided by spell check and make a decision. You might have to use your dictionary to confirm your decision.

Be careful. On a recent exam, a student wrote: "I am a well *manured* speaker. . ." when he intended to say: "I am a well *mannered* speaker. . ." Because "manured" was on the computer's list of words, spell check did not help the student to avoid an unfortunate error. You must reread your work very carefully.



**✓Reread your work**

All three assignments are scored for correctness of language—complete correct sentences, accurate words, correct grammar, correct spelling and punctuation. The scoring criteria for *Matters of Correctness* are quite rigorous. (Remember that you can get the scoring criteria from your teacher.)

You are expected to find and correct your own errors in spelling, punctuation, and language usage. Practise throughout the school year.

While you are writing the first draft, your mind is on your ideas, as it should be. Because you are concentrating on your ideas, it is easy to make errors. Therefore, it is important to take the time to reread and correct your work.

**✓Make corrections on your finished work**

Make your corrections, neatly and legibly, directly on your “Revised Work.” Markers will be pleased to see that you have taken the time to improve your finished work and to correct your mistakes.

## ***Hints for writing Section I: Personal Response to Literature***

**✓Understand the assignment**

Look at some previous exams so that you are familiar with what this assignment looks like. You will read a short piece of fiction or nonfiction and be asked to respond to a particular aspect—idea, character, attitude, decision, or action—from the selection.

The aspect from the selection will always be something that is common to most people. So, you should be able to think of some ideas to express about that aspect, and you should be able to explain and illustrate your ideas with examples from your own experience.

The assignment will always be in an assignment box so that it stands out. You may find it helpful to read the assignment box before you read the selection. This can help you to focus your reading.

**✓Avoid retelling the reading selection**

Remember that the writer of the reading selection has done a good job of telling what happened. Also, the teachers who will mark your response will have read the selection. Your job will be to comment on a particular aspect of the reading selection as directed in the assignment. You must not simply retell what happens in the selection.

If you choose simply to retell the plot of the reading selection, you risk getting a low mark, or even no mark at all, for Section I.

**✓Include specific details**

Support and explain your opinion about the idea given in the assignment box. Help your reader to understand why you think as you do by giving examples or illustrating your ideas. You can give examples from

- your own experiences and/or observations
- experiences of others
- books/stories
- films
- current events

*Show* your reader exactly what you mean by using specific details.

## ***Hints for writing Section II: Functional Writing***

**✓Remember the assigned audience and purpose**

The Functional Writing assignment is an imaginary, but practical, writing exercise. The assignment gives you a situation that could exist in real life. It states a purpose and tells who is to be the reader or audience for your writing.

Think about the assigned purpose—perhaps to convince the town council to build a teen centre, or to persuade a newspaper editor to hire you, or to invite a famous person to speak at your graduation ceremony.

Ask yourself what needs to be done to fulfill that purpose? Then, choose language (tone, precise words), details, and an order of presentation that will fulfill that purpose (convince, persuade, invite, etc.).

Try to imagine the “audience” or “reader”—town council, famous person, newspaper editor—and think about what that person needs to know in order to be persuaded. Think about the best way to “speak” to such a person. What words would work best? What information? What tone?

**✓Include *all* essential information**

Your audience (the imaginary person who reads your letter or listens to your speech) should not have to write back to you or ask you questions about missing information. Ask yourself—have I said everything that is necessary? Did I include information that is not needed? Did I leave out something important?

**✓Remember to “close” your letter or speech**

Always indicate to your reader or audience that you are available to provide additional information if it is required. Tell your reader how you can be reached. Thank members of your audience for their attention.



**✓Reread and improve your finished work**

Check your finished work carefully, and make the necessary changes. You might ask yourself the following questions:

- Is my writing clear, orderly, complete, to the point?
- Have I fulfilled the assigned purpose?
- Have I found and corrected all errors?
- Do I have the right information?
- How will my imaginary reader or audience respond?

## ***Hints for writing Section III: Response to Visual Communication***

**✓Understand the assignment**

This assignment asks you to

- look carefully at a photograph
- decide what the photo “says” to a viewer (you)
- think about what the photographer did in order to convey that “message”

**✓Plan and think**

Look at the details in the photograph. Think about how those details come together to contribute to what the photograph is “saying.” Determine the main idea, theme, or message that the photograph conveys to you. Jot this idea down so that you won’t forget it.

Make a list of some of the decisions you think the photographer made so that his or her message would be clear to viewers.

**✓Form a generalization**

Your response should include a statement that expresses what you think is the main idea, message, or theme of the photograph.

**✓Support your generalization**

Support your generalization (your statement about the main idea/message that you see in the photograph). Remember your list from planning. What details in the photograph helped you to decide what the message is? Here are some questions you could ask yourself:

- Has the photographer posed the photograph? Or is it candid?
- Where is the camera relative to the subject(s) in the photograph? What effect does this create?
- Are there shadows? Bright light? What effect does this create?
- What is the effect of the colour? Or, what is the effect of texture in a black and white shot?
- What might be outside the frame of the photograph? Why has the photograph been cropped like this?
- How are the subjects in the photograph arranged? Why?



## *Preparing to Write Part B: Reading*

### **✓Read throughout the year**

Read, talk about what you have read, write down ideas, participate in class. No one becomes a thoughtful reader without practice.

### **✓Understand the exam**

The second part of the English 33 diploma exam is worth 50% of the exam mark. This part is a multiple-choice exam, but don't fool yourself—it's not easy. Some students may think that the questions are simple, and they may work too fast. Such students rarely do well.

PART B: READING has a booklet of reading selections—poems, short plays, short stories, and essays—and a booklet of multiple-choice questions about each reading selection. There are 70 questions in total—about 10 on each reading selection.

It is a good idea to take the time to look at the whole exam before you begin. If you feel uncomfortable with the first reading selection, begin with one that you feel confident about—but be careful that you use the correct numbers on the answer sheet.

You will have a total of two and one-half hours for this part of the exam. You will probably be able to finish comfortably in two hours. However, you should use any extra time to check those questions that gave you difficulty.

### **✓Understand how the questions work**

Each set of multiple-choice questions is designed to take you back through the reading selection in a systematic way.

- The first questions in the set will establish the context for the entire set. They are usually questions about straightforward details, actions, or information. These questions should alert you to important ideas or details that will help you to understand the whole text.
- The next questions will ask about specific elements of the selection. For example, there could be questions about
  - meanings of words, phrases, or figures of speech
  - writer's tone
  - the effect of the writer's choices on the reader
  - details about characters—motivation, relationships, attitudes, traits, etc.
- The last questions will require you to consider the reading selection as a whole. For example, the last questions could be about
  - the main idea, theme, or thesis
  - the writer's purpose



✓ **Know the types of questions on the exam**

Generally, there are two styles of questions:

- “**best**” answer questions
- “**correct**” answer questions

**Best** answer questions test your powers of judgement. They always include words such as **best**, **most strongly**, or **most clearly**. All of the alternatives (A, B, C, and D) could be correct. But, only one of the alternatives is the “**best**” response to the question, given the context of the story, play, or poem.

**Correct** answer questions have only one possible correct answer. The other three alternatives are definitely wrong.

However, read carefully. Wrong answers are often appealing to someone who has not read the question, the story, play, or poem very carefully. Make sure that you are not that “someone.”

✓ **Use reading and thinking strategies that work for you**

Readers create meaning in different ways. By doing a great deal of reading, talking, and writing about your reading during the year, you should come to know the best ways for you to work through a new or difficult reading selection. Use that knowledge about your own thinking processes to your advantage on the exam.

Here are some strategies that might work for you:

- **Use the extra information provided**  
Often we include explanatory information with the story, play, or poem. If the setting is foreign or historical, we will explain that; if there is other background information that will be helpful, we will provide it. We also give information about the writer—country/nationality, occupation, dates, etc.—whatever might be helpful to you. We footnote unusual words. All of this is intended to make your reading a little easier. Use this information to your advantage.
- **Read all of the questions before you read the selection**  
Sometimes the questions will give you clues about what to pay attention to in the reading selection.
- **Take the time to reread**  
Many questions contain quotations from the selection. Line references are given. **It is *always* worthwhile to reread the lines that are referenced.** Think about the meanings of these lines, where they are in the selection, and how they are part of the whole selection. *If you take the time to reread, you are certain to improve your mark on Part B.*
- **Use your best judgement**  
Use your understanding of the reading selection and your judgement to eliminate the alternatives that are most likely wrong and to select a right answer from the alternatives that remain. Check your answer against the question and the text.



- **Identify the correct answer in your mind**

Read the first part of the question and think of what the right answer should be. Is your “answer” listed as A, B, C, or D? If not, reread the question. Check the reading selection and try again.

- **Make notes on the exam booklet**

Highlight key words and phrases in the questions. Highlight important words, ideas, and information in the reading selections. The exam booklet is yours to use. Use it to help you.

- ✓ **Aim to extend your vocabulary over time**

Some of the questions on Part B test your ability to figure out what a word means by using context, prefixes, suffixes, derivatives, and other similar clues.

You will have a distinct advantage if you have developed your vocabulary. Remember, you won’t have a dictionary for Part B.

## ***Additional Reminders***

- ✓ **Try to relax**

Having some anxiety when writing examinations is natural, but don’t get too “stressed-out.” (Instead of last-minute cramming, get a good night’s sleep.) Try to stay calm and relaxed as you complete the exam. Concentrate on giving the exam your best effort.

It might help to remember that the exam markers are English 33 teachers who understand what exam conditions are like and who want to see you do well.

- ✓ **Further information about the exam**

For more detailed information about the English 33 diploma examination, ask your teacher about a booklet from Alberta Education called the *English 33 Information Bulletin*. Each English 33 teacher will have a copy.

This bulletin contains a great deal of information about the exam. The scoring criteria used by markers are also included.



✓ **Samples of Students' Writing**

Examples of students' responses to assignments from past English 33 diploma examinations should be available in your school. Ask your teacher to discuss these with you. Keep in mind, however, that the model responses in the *Samples of Students' Writing* documents have been provided *for instructional purposes only*. If you memorize sections from these responses and use them while writing Part A, markers will know. You will be guilty of plagiarism and will be in breach of examination regulations.

Additional copies of *Samples of Students' Writing from the English 33 Diploma Examinations January and June 1994* are available from the Learning Resources Distributing Centre, 12360 142 Street Edmonton T5K 4X9, or by phoning 403-427-5775.

✓ **Exam-writing materials**

You are responsible for providing your own writing materials—pens, HB pencils, highlighters, etc.

✓ **Rescores**

You may request a rescoring of your examination if you believe that the mark you have received is not appropriate. Before applying for a rescoring, be sure to check your *Diploma Examination Results Statement* to see what marks you have been awarded on both parts of the exam. Your Part B mark is not likely to change, but your Part A mark could change slightly. Keep in mind that if you do request a rescoring, your new mark, whether it increases *or decreases*, will be your final mark. There is a \$26.75 fee for this service.

✓ **Other questions**

If you have questions about the exam that your teacher can't answer, or if you are a student without a regular classroom teacher, feel free to call

Mr. Tom Dunn, English 33 Examination Manager

or

Ms. Elana Scraba, Assistant Director, Humanities Diploma Exams  
at 403-427-0010.

To call toll-free from outside of Edmonton dial 310-0000.

***Good Luck!***

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